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Going to Buy Furniture?

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going to **BUY FURNITURE?**

by **Mabel C. Fisher**

THERE IS MORE furniture, better quality furniture and a wider variety on the market. But you will still want to shop for it carefully. It represents a long-time investment.

Prices are still high on fine quality pieces. Furniture of medium price range is beginning to show up mainly because manufacturers are trying to cut manufacturing costs. Unfinished or "knock-down" units of furniture can be had at lower cost. How satisfactory they will be depends, I think, on whether we're willing to spend the time and effort to make these pieces look their best.

When to Buy

When is a good time to buy furniture? You will find that buying furniture as you need it and can afford it is wiser than buying an item simply because it's a bargain. Some stores have semi-annual February and August sales when they offer their regular stock at substantial discounts. Or they may have mark-

downs on certain pieces which they wish to close out. These may be odd pieces left from suites, or items of fine furniture which the manufacturer is discontinuing, or they may be good quality pieces which just haven't sold. Sometimes they are articles which can't be matched or duplicated. If these pieces will fill a real need and fit in with other pieces you already have, they may be economical buys. On the other hand, make sure that you're not getting furniture which has been cheaply constructed specifically for a sale.

Know Your Merchant

Unless you have a broad knowledge of furniture, its construction and material, you'd better trade with an established merchant whom you can trust. Compare costs in order to know whether the price is in line with the quality of furniture. Ask about construction and guarantees.

Cash or Charge

Is it wise to put off buying until you can pay cash? That depends on your budget and the credit plan of the store. Buying less furniture, but good furniture, and paying cash for it is always a good idea. If you plan to use credit, compare the extra cost with the cash price. "Buying on time" may be more expensive than you think.

Some points to check on are the kind of material used—whether it is wood, metal, fabric, metal springs (number and how tied), or has foam rubber in place of springs. Also check on the finish, kind and number of springs in an upholstered chair, type of filling in the upholstery and shrinkage.

Furniture Woods

Don't expect to recognize all the woods used in furniture. Not only are many kinds of woods used, but stains, fillers, lacquers and varnishes change the appear-

ance of some of them. Look for descriptive labeling. The Federal Trade Commission has established certain standards in cooperation with the furniture industry. They are buying guides.

Be sure not to misinterpret the label. Some tags indicate only the finish on the wood, not the kind of wood itself. A mahogany finish does not necessarily mean that the wood is mahogany. Walnut finish does not imply genuine walnut.

Walnut, mahogany, maple, birch, oak, gumwood and cherry are most commonly used. Gumwood is a southern hardwood. It is found more often in moderate and lower-priced furniture. It will take a walnut or mahogany finish better than other less expensive woods.

Bleached woods are natural woods given a beige or tan color through a bleaching process. They are sold under various trade names. Mahogany, walnut, maple, birch, oak and beech are often treated this way.

Today the trend is toward more natural color woods—at least not woods which are so definitely bleached. Bleached wood that is naturally dark will in time revert to almost its original darkness.

Solid or Veneer

You can find good quality furniture in either solid or veneer. Solid woods are better for furniture that has much intricate carving. Sometimes plastics or composition woods are used for the carved sections of furniture. Solid and laminated woods are both used for posts, legs and other supporting or bracing parts of furniture. High-priced furniture may be solid rather than veneer.

Softwoods now are being especially treated to give them much the appearance and strength of hardwoods.

Veneer furniture is not necessarily inferior. Some of it is of fine quality.

Plywood also goes into furniture—usually where special surface strength is needed as in chair backs. It is also satisfactory for

use in posts, legs or other supporting or bracing portions of furniture. Cost of plywood furniture is usually lower.

Price and Quality

There's much difference between the quality of materials and the kind of craftsmanship which go into high-grade, medium and low-priced furniture. It pays to examine furniture closely, inside, underneath and wherever the most stress and strain will occur.

Here are some factors you should expect in top, medium and low-quality goods:

Upholstered Furniture

In top-quality upholstered furniture—springs are tied eight ways, covered with horsehair and cotton felt. The springs will have closely laced webbing, dust-protected in sateen. It will be finely upholstered in strong woven fabric. In medium-quality upholstered furniture—the springs may be built as in top quality but sometimes are not covered with horsehair. The fabric will be less expensive, or the covering may be sateen or strong muslin so that pieces may be either upholstered with a fabric you choose or slip-covered. In low-quality upholstered furniture—the springs may be covered with muslin, over moss and cotton filling. Sometimes foam-rubber, in the form of cushions, is substituted for springs. This requires more rigid under-cushion construction. The upholstering may be inexpensive fabric.

Test the furniture. Press the springs to see if they are even and firm. Check to see if the corner blocks brace the wooden frame. Sit on it to see if it's comfortable. Note whether it is good in scale for your room and your family. Beware of buying furniture without government inspection labels which tell what materials are used. It is illegal for sellers to remove these labels.

Chairs

Check chairs to see if they are finished underneath to prevent warping. Make sure the legs are firm and even, that the underconstruction is mortised and the corner blocks are fastened with screws and not nails. Avoid slanted legs unless they are well braced. Legs that show a cross-grain in the wood may split.

Tables

Higher priced, fine-quality tables may be made from mahogany, walnut, fruit woods, fine veneers on hardwood, or even lacquered wood with mirror or plate glass tops. The finish should be able to withstand heat, scratches or liquids.

Medium-quality tables may be veneered wood on part gumwood base. They may be made of maple, oak and fruit woods, and with finishes to resist heat. Lower quality tables may be pine—stained, painted or unpainted. They may have gum frames with veneer tops finished to represent walnut or mahogany. Sturdy, unpainted pieces may be your best buy.

Is Style Important?

It is possible to combine different styles of furniture in your home. Modern furniture may go well with more traditional pieces you have. If the furniture you now have is massive and heavily carved, avoid buying new pieces which are delicate. If you have dark woods, but like the appearance of the light tones, get some lighter pieces but keep the general effect or appearance of the furniture somewhat alike.

Buying furniture is not as easy as buying a hat. At least you can't hide a mistake on furniture in the closet! On the other hand, shopping for furniture can be an interesting adventure, worth all the time and thought you put into it.